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ABSTRACT

This study is the eighth in a series of reports from the Reading-to-Write Project, a collaborative study of students' cognitive processes at one critical point of entry into academic performance. This report examines the initial reading strategies that a group of participating students used to begin a reading-to-write task and the impact of those strategies on the composing that follows. Subjects, 17 college freshmen (of a total of 72 participating either as controls or as experimental subjects), wrote essays, recorded their think-aloud protocols, and were interviewed concerning their reading and writing processes. Results indicated that students' history in school acts as a "legacy of literate behavior" in that the habits and assumptions from schooling appear as procedures for reading and writing and are evident in the opening moves by students to represent and translate a writing task into a draft. Results also indicated that students' opening moves often become a "legacy within the composition of a draft," but that they can begin to translate their immediate rhetorical situation into a more self-directed event by looking closely at the juncture between early comprehension and translation. (The Reading-to-Write study reference list is attached.) (RS)

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Technical Report No. 27

TRANSLATING CONTEXT INTO ACTION

(Reading-to-Write Report No. 8)

John Ackerman

May, 1989

This Report will appear as a chapter in *Reading-to-Write: Exploring a Cognitive and Social Process*, by Linda Flower, Victoria Stein, John Ackerman, Margaret J. Kantz, Kathleen McCormick, and Wayne C. Peck, to be published by Oxford University Press. An overview of the Study to which this Report refers can be found in CSW Technical Report No. 21, *Studying Cognition in Context: Introduction to the Study*.

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Preface to the Reading-to-Write Reports

> So I'm just gonna--I don't care, I'm just going to interpret them the only way I can interpret them. . . . Let's just put what the authors agreed on. *Authors agree* -- We'll just -- If at least two of them concur, we'll say they agree. *Authors in general agree that. . . .* But then they don't agree -- There's nothing you can say about this. . . .
>
> Can I leave it at that. . . . Oh give me a break, I don't know what I'm doing. I'm only a freshman. I have no idea what to do.
>
> Darlene, a first-semester freshman

Darlene's college assignment asked for synthesis and interpretation. The paper she turned in--a short, simplistic review of material from her sources--failed to meet her own expectations and her readers'. And yet, a chance to look at the process behind this unsophisticated product revealed serious thinking, a complicated, if confused, decision process, and a trail of unused abilities and discarded ideas--an active encounter with academic discourse that her teacher would never see.

The study presented here takes an unusually comprehensive look at one critical point of entry into academic performance. It shows a group of freshmen in the transition into the academic discourse of college, looking at the ways in which they interpret and negotiate an assignment that calls for reading to write. On such tasks, students are reading in order to create a *text* of their own, trying to integrate information from sources with *ideas* of their own, and attempting to do so under the guidance of a *purpose* they must themselves create. Because these reading-to-write tasks ask students to integrate reading, writing, and rhetorical purpose, they open a door to critical literacy. Yet this same interaction often makes reading-to-write a difficult process for students to learn and to manage.

In order to get a rounded picture of cognition in this academic context, the study looks at the thinking processes of these students from a number of perspectives, drawing on think-aloud protocols of students writing and revising, on interviews with and self-analyses by the students, and on comparisons of teachers' and students' perceptions of texts the students wrote. It attempts to place these observations within a broader contextual analysis of the situation as students saw it and the social and cultural assumptions about schooling they brought with them.

What this study revealed were some radical differences in how individual students represent an academic writing task to themselves--differences which teachers might interpret as a simple indication of a student's ability rather than a student's interpretation of the task. The students were often unaware that such alternative representations existed or that they might hold such significance. Some images of the task, for instance, such as those dominated by the goals of comprehension, summary, and simple response, offered little or no place for critical response, original synthesis, or interpretation for a rhetorical purpose.

The reading-to-write task students imagined for themselves also had a direct effect on performance: it affected the goals they set, the strategies they used, and the

ways they solved problems during composing. And it led to differences in teachers' evaluations of the texts--although, this study suggested, these evaluations may confuse the conventions of organization (e.g., use of topic sentences) with the writer's control of ideas. When students began to examine their options and attempt the more demanding task of interpreting for a purpose, certain students, whom we called the Intenders, showed important changes in their writing and thinking process. These changes, however, were not evident in the text and nor apparent to teachers. Finally, this study showed how students' images of the task were rooted in the students' histories, the context of schooling, and cultural assumptions about writing which they brought to college.

It is not surprising to find that some of the images students bring with them are at odds with the expectations they encounter at a university. However, when the expectations for "college-level" discourse are presented in oblique and indirect ways, the transition students face may be a *masked* transition. That is, the task has changed, but for a number of reasons, the magnitude and real nature of this change may not be apparent to students, even as they fail to meet the university's expectations.

One of the key implications of this study is that reading-to-write is a task with more faces and a process with more demands than we have realized. We see students thinking hard and doing smart things, even when they misgauge their goals or their written text fails to meet certain standards. This close survey of the cognitive and social landscape of reading-to-write in a college class gives one added respect for the students in this transition and for the complexity and sophistication of the "freshman" task as they face it.

The Reading-to-Write Project was carried out as a collaborative effort at the Center for the Study of Writing, at Carnegie Mellon. We designed the study to create a range of alternative perspectives on the process of reading-to-write and on the way cognition is shaped by the social context of school. The following technical reports present the design and collaborative history of the study; analyses of the cognitive processes we observed, of the texts, and of students' perceptions of both; and a set of conclusions, from different theoretical perspectives, on how students manage this entry into academic discourse:

Reading-to-Write Report 1. (CSW Tech. Report 21) — **Studying Cognition in Context: Introduction to the Study. Linda Flower**

Reading-to-write is an act of critical literacy central to much of academic discourse. This project, divided into an Exploratory Study and a Teaching Study, examines the cognitive processes of reading-to-write as they are embedded in the social context of a college course.

Reading-to-Write Report 2. (CSW Tech. Report 6) — **The Role of Task Representation in Reading-to-Write. Linda Flower**

The different ways in which students represented a "standard" reading-to-write task to themselves led to marked differences in students' goals and strategies as well as their organizing plans. This raised questions about the costs and benefits of these alternative representations and about students' metacognitive control of their own reading and writing processes.

Reading-to-Write Report 3. (CSW Tech. Report 22)

Promises of Coherence, Weak Content, and Strong Organization: An Analysis of the Student Texts. Margaret J. Kantz

Analysis of students' Organizing Plans (including free response, summary, review and comment, synthesis, and interpretation for a rhetorical purpose) also revealed a hybrid plan in which certain coherence conventions gave the promise of synthesis while the paper's substance reflected a simpler review and comment strategy. Both students and teachers, it appeared, may sometimes confuse coherence strategies (for text) with knowledge transformation strategies (for content).

Reading-to-Write Report 4. (CSW Tech. Report 23)

Students' Self-Analyses and Judges' Perceptions: Where Do They Agree? John Ackerman

Any writing assignment is a negotiation between a teacher's expectations and a student's representation of the task. Students' Self-Analysis Checklists showed a strong shift in perception for students in the experimental training condition, but a tellingly low agreement with judges' perceptions of the texts.

Reading-to-Write Report 5. (CSW Tech. Report 24)

Exploring the Cognition of Reading-to-Write. Victoria Stein.

A comparison of the protocols of 36 students showed differences in ways students monitored their comprehension, elaborated, structured the reading and planned their texts. A study of these patterns of cognition and case studies of selected students revealed both some successful and some problematic strategies students brought to this reading-to-write task.

Reading-to-Write Report 6. (CSW Tech. Report 25)

Elaboration: Using What You Know. Victoria Stein

The process of elaboration allowed students to use prior knowledge not only for comprehension and critical thinking, but also for structuring and planning their papers. However, much of this valuable thinking failed to be transferred into students' papers.

Reading-to-Write Report 7. (CSW Tech. Report 26)

The Effects of Prompts Upon Revision: A Glimpse of the Gap between Planning and Performance. Wayne C. Peck

Students who were introduced to the options of task representation and prompted to attempt the difficult task of "interpreting for a purpose of one's own" on revision were far more likely to change their organizing plan than students prompted merely to revise to "make the text better." However, the protocols also revealed a significant group of students we called "Intenders" who, for various reasons, made plans they were unable to translate into text.

Reading-to-Write Report 8. (CSW Tech. Report 27) — **Translating Context into Action. John Ackerman**

One context for writing is the student's history of schooling including high school assignments and essays. Based on protocols, texts, and interviews, this report describes a set of "initial reading strategies" nearly every freshman used to begin the task--strategies that appear to reflect their training in summarization and recitation of information. From this limited and often unexamined starting point, students then had to construct a solution path which either clung to, modified, or rejected this a-rhetorical initial approach to reading and writing.

Reading-to-Write Report 9. (CSW Tech. Report 28) — **The Cultural Imperatives Underlying Cognitive Acts. Kathleen McCormick**

By setting reading-to-write in a broad cultural context we explore some of the cultural imperatives that might underlie particular cognitive acts. Protocols and interviews suggest that three culturally-based attitudes played a role in this task: the desire for closure, a belief in objectivity, and a refusal to write about perceived contradictions.

Reading-to-Write Report 10. (CSW Tech. Report 29) — **Negotiating Academic Discourse. Linda Flower**

Entering an academic discourse community is both a cognitive and social process guided by strategic knowledge, that is, by the goals writers set based on their reading of the context, by the strategies they invoke, and by their awareness of both these processes. As students move from a process based on comprehension and response to a more fully rhetorical, constructive process, they must embed old strategies within new goals, new readings of the rhetorical situation. However, for both social and cognitive reasons, this process of negotiation and change that academic discourse communities expect may not be apparent to many students for whom this becomes a confusing and tacit transition.

Reading-to-Write Report 11. (CSW Tech. Report 30) — **Expanding the Repertoire: An Anthology of Practical Approaches for the Teaching of Writing. Kathleen McCormick *et al.***

One important implication of this entire study is that students themselves should come into the act of examining their own reading and writing processes and becoming more aware of cognitive and cultural implications of their choices. This set of classroom approaches, written by teachers collaborating on a Reading-to-Write course that grew out of this project, introduces students to ways of exploring their assumptions and alternative ways of represent aspects of the task.

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TRANSLATING CONTEXT INTO ACTION

By

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Writing is a social activity, and as teachers and researchers we knew that our students' responses to a reading-to-write assignment were as much a function of larger social, economic, and cultural influences as a function of the immediate social context of a writing task in a university classroom. We knew that the reading and writing behavior we saw was strongly influenced (if *determined* is too strong a word) by these students' 12 years of public schooling and 18 years (or so) of living in a literate culture. They did not walk into our classes or into our assignment as blank slates (Berkenkotter, Huckin, & Ackerman, 1988; Heath, 1983). They brought their lives with them, and our efforts to teach "strategies" for writing or "whole-text revision" or aims in academic discourse--as well as our writing task with explicit instructions to "interpret and synthesize" assigned readings--were scenes of negotiation. In a writing assignment students and teachers negotiate what is expected and what can be done: the requirements in a writing task are tempered by what students know how and prefer to do as writers.

Recent work in rhetorical theory can help us understand the complex forces at work in this negotiation. When we say that writing behavior is "socially constructed," we mean that the topics, rhetorical means, and linguistic conventions all have antecedents within a larger literate culture. Any given act of writing echoes previous literate practice and, more specifically, the literate practices of discourse communities (Porter, 1986). This means that the romantic image of the solitary writer, lost in a private war with words, is a myth (Brodkey, 1987a). The ideas a writer pursues through an act of composing are ideas that gain relevance because they have been shaped through community action (Geertz, 1983; LeFevre, 1987). The extension, refinement, and transmission of those ideas are made possible because writers share rhetorical and linguistic conventions. Of late, researchers such as Bazerman (1981, 1985), Myers (1985a,b), Swales (1984), and Huckin (1987) have demonstrated that the specialized knowledge displayed in social science writing is not only shaped through community action, it is shaped by the rhetorical and linguistic conventions in vogue in professional journals. The image of a writer belonging to and writing for a community with specialized conventions, in turn, is helping to clarify the difficulty some students have when they must write for university audiences. As Bartholomae has argued, freshman writers stand outside conversations between authorities in the university setting, and to answer our assignments they "appropriate" the language of an authority, "a reader for whom the general commonplaces and the readily available utterances about a subject are inadequate" (1985, pp. 135, 140).

An act of writing is a social construct, but it is also situationally determined. A "rhetorical situation," as defined by Bitzer, is the more immediate location and circumstance for writing, the "natural context of persons, events, objects, relations, and an exigence " which together invite an "utterance" (1968, p. 5). Bitzer's theory is helpful because it reminds writing teachers that a classroom assignment, and certainly the class's response to that assignment, is a unique, local manifestation of larger cultural, literate currents (Bartholomae, 1986). Just as this theory refines our awareness of the immediate situation surrounding and provoking an act of composing, it appears to ignore the role of the individual and has been criticized for being deterministic (Vatz, 1973). Scott Consigny defused some of this criticism by arguing

that a coherent view of rhetoric, or in this case a coherent view of student writing, includes both a "rhetorical situation" and the acknowledgement that writers are agents within a rhetorical situation (1974). Thus, the writer determines the rhetorical situation as much as the situation gives meaning to the utterance. Through an act of publication (making ideas available to a reader) within a rhetorical situation, a writer establishes or re-establishes her individuality within that culture and community.

This view of the interplay between a literate heritage, the immediate social or rhetorical situation, and a writer's ability to affect change within a discourse community balances the sometimes deterministic flavor of some theories of writing as a social activity:

> Even if the writer is locked into a cultural matrix and is constrained by the intertext of the discourse community, the writer has freedom within the immediate rhetorical context...successful writing helps to redefine the matrix--and in that way becomes creative...Every new text has the potential to alter the Text in some way; in fact every text admitted into a discourse community changes the constitution of the community--and discourse communities can revise their discursive practices.... (Porter, 1986, p. 41)

Sociolinguists also recognize that language users are agents within communities and cultures. Hudson, paraphrasing LePage, points out that a writer can belong to and write for more than one discourse community (1980). An act of writing can be thought of as an act of *positioning* oneself at a point within a "multidimensional" space, so that writing within a rhetorical situation means *choosing* the means to address one community without denying wholesale the topical, rhetorical, and linguistic conventions of other discourse communities. In any one act of composing, then, a writer's behavior is a composite of years of literate practice, and a negotiation between the more immediate rhetorical situation, which echoes those years of practice, and the individual stamp a writer can bring to the circumstance for writing. We believe that writing instruction and guidance should help our students "choose the means" to address a language community. And, we believe one place to begin is to search out the antecedents for an act of composing in rhetorical and cultural contexts.

Most theories of writing and rhetoric, however, are built from images of accomplished writers who have made the transition to full membership in a discourse community and a literate culture. When we think about the relative success our students have had in high school English class, as evident by "A" papers and acceptable proficiency test scores and college entrance exams, our students (in a sense) successfully publish for an academic audience. But, the gap between the reading and writing skills which provide access to the university community and the skills necessary to thrive there is known to many and is commonly articulated as a university's commitment to undergraduate and graduate level writing instruction. We would not say that our students are "redefining" the university community every time they publish a paper for a teacher in freshman writing; for lack of practice and exposure, they do not yet know how to act in the role of an accomplished member of a specialized discourse community. They are students who have succeeded in one environment and now must transfer their know-how to a different setting, with sometimes very different requirements for performance. As we watched our students write, we noticed what we thought were traces of our students' history as readers and writers in school as they first represented the reading-to-write assignment to themselves. For many students, "schooling" created a bind between the habits and assumptions they brought to the immediate rhetorical situation and their efforts to

re-represent the assignment, to take their writing a step beyond the "commonplaces and readily available utterances" they first thought were expected or acceptable.

This bind is partly why freshman writers and the teaching of reading and writing fascinate us. Freshman writers are both experts and novices: they bring years of practice with academic discourse, bound up in the habits and assumptions exhibited in our classrooms. They are novices in that they have less practice with the assignments and expectations common to the university setting: an act of publishing a paper for a teacher in freshman composition (or history or psychology) is as much a reliance on these habits and assumptions as is the acquisition of new rhetorical or linguistic skill. As Bartholomae points out, freshman writers falsely assume, often with the very best intentions, that commonplaces such as the five-paragraph theme will be read and accepted by a knowledgeable audience comprised of readers who have long-since distanced themselves from such conventions.

What students need to be helped to see, then, is that a fluency with certain rhetorical and linguistic commonplaces--the specialized conventions of an academic or professional discipline--will come in time with practice, and the more comfortable, routine commonplaces--the reading and writing habits that won success elsewhere--must be examined, refined, and extended in the time being. And, students need to be encouraged to understand that the choice to rely or depart from a commonplace is theirs to make. As linguists and scholars suggest, since specialized rhetorical and linguistic conventions exist, we ought to teach them directly, to make a student aware of the expectations of new language community (Bizzell, 1982; Swales, 1984). But, that awareness and practice ought to build upon the knowledge of when to rely on or depart from more general reading and writing skills. Commonplaces--such as stuffy academic terms and phrases, deductive informational patterns, or a conclusion that mirrors an introduction--by themselves are not the problem; they echo literate practice. It is when a writer (young or not-so-young) uses them without knowledge of their commonality and, thus, without care for their limitations that readers see them and turn the other way.

For our purposes, original writing, the writing we expected to see in response to our reading-to-write assignment, is generated by writers who bring a healthy skepticism. They actively question a writing situation and their invested responses to that situation. Decisions on how to begin, how to make sense of assigned passages, or how to construct a plan for writing ought to invoke questions by students about the origins of their literate practices and their appropriateness to the rhetorical situation at hand as well as their own sense of who they are or want to be as writers. It is, in fact, the interrelationships among cultural and immediate rhetorical contexts and how a writer translates those contexts into action that interests us here.

Locating Context: In Writers, In a Culture

How is it that the "cultural matrix" of literate behavior influences the reading and writing practices of a student in freshman composition? Or, from the perspective of the writer inside a linguistic community, how do these students translate context into an intellectual act? If we adopt for a moment a theory of memory from cognitive psychology, we might say that context is "stored" in the form of schemata (Bartlett, 1932; Rumelhart & Ortony, 1977), and that schemata provide procedures for acting in accordance with cultural and contextual expectations. Schema theory posits that shared experience becomes ingrained in the individual and--when the situation invites--is replayed through common procedures for living out lives. We can see socially-derived schemata at work when students demonstrate test-taking know-how, or when a reader assumes that a story should include characters, plot, climax, and

resolution, or when we enter a restaurant and pause at the door to be seated. In all three cases someone supplies or infers missing information; these actions and expectations are guided by schemata which are habits of mind formed through years of practice. Cultural influence, then, is not a static phenomenon. The fact that freshman writers have resided in a literate culture and have accumulated hours upon hours of experience reading and writing--all of which is brought to bear on a situation for writing--means that context reveals itself in the form of procedures. And conversely, the literate procedures students used to represent and act upon our assignment can be traced back to their contextual antecedents. It is the procedural form of stored schematic knowledge that takes the longest to develop, that is the most deeply rooted in specific learning situations, and is finally is the most useful in helping a problem solver succeed at a complex task (for an extended discussion of procedural vs declarative knowledge, knowing *how* vs knowing *that*, see Anderson, 1983).

This analysis of student writing found in this paper begins with two observations: first, a writer's history in school acts as a *legacy of literate behavior* in that the habits and assumptions from schooling appear as procedures for reading and writing and are evident in the opening moves by students to represent and to translate a writing task into a draft. When a freshman writer receives an assignment, there is a good chance that the task at hand is ill-defined, in that requirements and materials are newly-encountered. Thus, when students face an unfamiliar writing task, we can expect them to begin with what they know how to do as stable, productive first moves to make the unfamiliar more familiar. A second observation is that our students' opening moves, which translate the assignment into something familiar and doable, often became a *legacy within the composition of a draft*. The first impression of the assignment, and especially the initial moves to comprehend the readings, became a lasting impression. Students' opening moves to understand and initiate the assignment narrowed the choices in the composing behavior that followed. In other words, for many students the first impression and accompanying procedures--born from their reading of the task directions, materials, and the rhetorical situation implied by the assignment--were indelible.

Our first task in this report is to describe these opening moves and to study them as a legacy of literate behavior and as strong influences on the immediate rhetorical situation. Our second task is to explore how the imprint of those procedures, the legacy within the composition, directs the composing that follows in completing the first draft of an assignment. To help us think about the legacy of an opening move, we conceptualized each student's composing (represented in the protocol data) as two broad yet distinct episodes. Episodes of *early comprehension* temporally and procedurally are those opening moves where students represent and initially act upon an assignment. Early comprehension is comprised of several common behaviors: perusing the explicit requirements of an assignment, taking whatever practical steps are necessary to define and limit that assignment (questions, comparisons, models), and reading the assigned passages primarily to surmise topical and textual boundaries. Collectively these behaviors are the procedural counterparts to a represented task and predictably are partial evidence of a student's history with writing in school and out. Episodes of *translation* begins when students in some way move beyond initial representations and procedures--by planning a written response, or rereading for a specific purpose, or reviewing notes to consolidate and order ideas. These behaviors, like the outward behaviors associated with early comprehension, are not by themselves distinctive. What we found remarkable was the linearity and causality suggested by these clusters of behaviors and their eventual effect upon a written product. We wondered what conscious decisions or habits of mind guide the translation of early comprehension into a course of action.

We split our students' reading and writing behavior into two episodes for several reasons. First, we needed a conceptual tool to guide our observations. The opening moves by students to understand the assignment and familiarize themselves with the readings (found in early comprehension) were distinct from the moves to actually begin writing out a response. And because these moves appeared to be familiar, habitual, and practiced ways to begin, we took them to be the best example of how the influence of schooling reveals itself in an immediate rhetorical situation. Students read first to learn what the authorities on "time management" were talking about as if to learn the lay of the land, and the episode of early comprehension was often marked by questions such as "What are these people talking about and what do you (teacher) want me to say?", questions (and answers) these students had seen before. To gauge by their actions, students responded to these questions with the sure-footed expertise that comes from years of practice.

The episodes also enabled us to label differences in physical behavior associated with composing. When students shifted from early comprehension of the task and readings to efforts to translate this information into a plan to write, there was a proportional shift in the amount of energy devoted first to reading and taking notes and then to reading notes and writing sentences. The shift in activities seemed to correspond to the prominence of a new question: "Ok, I've got my notes, now how can I use them to begin writing?" How a writer answered that question was indicative of the degree to which a writer was re-representing a rhetorical situation. In the period of translation, a writer faced in some manner the legacy of schooling. Schooling, which provided the student with the procedures to begin the assignment, either continued as a legacy which shaped the composing of the draft to follow--*or*, if the act of translation became a scene for *continued negotiation*, students tried to re-represent and redefine the task before them.

If we want students to redefine a rhetorical situation, and perhaps alter the direction of an act of composing, we are not advocating that they deny their literate heritage--as if that were possible. They can, however, slow and complicate the act of translating context into action by consciously examining the know-how they bring to an assignment. This know-how, as it appears in an opening move, is typically beyond the purview of a teacher. After all, though assignments begin in a sense with course descriptions and handouts, they begin in earnest away from the classroom when the writer addresses not only explicit directions but also the blank page. When students return with a draft for sharing or clarification of the assignment or evaluation of work completed thus far, the opening moves to represent a doable assignment are already indelible. Research on revision has underscored what writing teachers and writers see time and time again. The first response to an assignment, by habit and practical necessity, is an investment that writers do not easily cast aside--even when they benefit most by rethinking and starting anew (Flower, et al., 1986; Sommers, 1980).

The Legacy of Schooling

The opening moves our students used to begin reading and writing can be inferred from their drafts and from the comments they made as they composed. If we wish to trace the origins of these moves, their antecedents in a literate culture, we must decide how we will view the cultural and rhetorical contexts in which our students' writing is located. What, for instance, does a social or cultural context for writing consist of? Are there observable characteristics that could allow researchers, teachers, and students of writing to differentiate among various contextual influences? One thing is clear: larger cultural and more immediate rhetorical contexts are two sides of the same coin; there are a number of contexts in which our students compose--all of which reflect larger cultural and political pressures as well as more immediate situational concerns.

By first specifying and briefly examining these contexts, we can perhaps more accurately address the interplay between culture, rhetorical situations, and our students' unique roles as writers. We also found that the exercise of describing and differentiating these contexts helped us make explicit some of our underlying assumptions about where language comes from and how it is put to use. We do not presume to capture or fairly represent the complexity of a cultural matrix, nor to adequately represent how various socio-cultural elements are interrelated. Here are seven perspectives on context, our way of defining the "cultural matrix" and our paths into a consideration of why our students' writing is a "social activity."

Reading and writing in society. Reading and writing are learned technologies that reflect the cultural needs of a society. Reading and writing taught in school are responsive to the aims and preferences of the dominant linguistic culture in which school is embedded. The students in this study are members of a literate society insofar as they have successfully completed their public education, while at the same time acquiring the normalized forms of literate behavior favored in a variety of situations and mediums (Jameson, 1980; Ong, 1982).

Schooling. School mirrors society and disseminates, through academic language and practice, society's values for knowledge and communication. Learning to read and write is not the same thing as learning to read and write in school even though these abilities are mostly bound up in the culture of schooling. School teaches students to read and write while at the same time inculcating well-defined habits and assumptions that help to sustain the larger society (Balibar & Machery,1981; Heath, 1983; Scribner & Cole, 1981).

Academic discourse communities. Specialized groups exist within school and elsewhere in society with relatively distinct forums for communication, case-building methods, rhetorical conventions, and a canon of topics. To be a member of a discourse community means to participate in the relevant issues of a professional group, a demonstration that a writer's contributions have currency. Though the students in this study come from varying backgrounds, they attempt through their writing to participate in a local expression of academic performance, the university, and more specialized groups such as majors and departments (Porter, 1986; Swales, 1987).

Linguistic and rhetorical practice in communities. Discourse communities and even specific classrooms are marked by preferred forms and uses for reading and writing. These textual conventions are the boundary markers for a literate context in that reading and writing are visible and permanent indices of social interaction. In this way, textual features demark a context. Commonality across discourse practice is evidence of the social foundation behind a discipline, a discourse community, or a classroom (Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984; Myers, 1985a,b).

Classrooms. Classrooms form ad hoc discourse communities within school, each with routines, codes, conventions, and ethos defined momentarily by the actions of the class. The classroom is also the locus for the expression of the literate practices of the class members as the teacher's assumptions and objectives for the course and the students' experience in school merge (Herrington, 1985; Richardson, et al., 1983).

Assignments. A writing assignment is an immediate context in that it is a situation for composing, triggering the "exigence" for a writer and outlining explicit directions and materials in a rhetorical situation. Task directions, parameters for performance, and situational constraints create a local context, an occasion to read and write. Assignments are acts of negotiation, revealing the habits, assumptions, and expectations of both teachers and students. (Bartholomae, 1983; Ruth & Murphy, 1987).

A student's own intellectual history. To acknowledge a personal "frame of reference" is to acknowledge that contextual influence is uniquely represented in each of us. A "point of view" is, at once, both idiosyncratic and evidence of socially constructed knowledge--a personal, intellectual history does not at all deny the effect of social interaction. As mentioned earlier, the vitality of linguistically-defined social groups depends on the creative acts of publication by individual members. People do have their own perspectives, frames, or points of view, and do surprise us, in acceptable ways, with their idiosyncrasies. Those who teach are reminded of this claim when students return each semester to solve our assignments in varied and meaningful ways (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1983; Hayes, 1985).

These contexts remind us that the lines separating the larger, cultural context and the immediate rhetorical context for composing easily blur. The effort to understand how contexts overlap offers both a vocabulary and a vantage point for talking about the origins of reading and writing procedures. For example, a convention such as a purpose statement in an opening paragraph can be argued to be more of a local convention of a writing class than an accepted convention in written public discourse or a specialized discourse community. The rhetorical situation in which our students composed was a convergence of a range of socially-derived influences. As noted earlier, students not only wrote in response to an assignment or situation, they wrote in a multidimensional space where home, school, class, assignment, and their unique habits of mind converge. The student writers in this study provide glimmers of all of these contexts in their writing--with the predictable exception of full membership in a specialized "academic discourse community." From our perspective as college writing teachers, freshmen in college can be thought of as situated between communities. They are longstanding members of a rambling discourse community called public education, and we can expect to see traces of this membership when they read and write for us. The point of continuing their education is (for many) to embark on specialized careers which will eventually include specialized language practice.

The convergence of contextual influence appears in all kinds of behavior in the classroom--from the way students granted a teacher authority to the manner in which our assignments were addressed. We saw the convergence especially in the procedures, the opening moves, students demonstrated as they first responded to our reading-to-write assignment. As we have stated earlier in this paper, students read first to gauge the lay of the land, to see what the assigned authorities and the teacher (through the assignment directions) were talking about. Independent raters reported little trouble isolating the outward signs of a shift in attention from reading to understand the boundaries of topic and assignment and to making and acting out decisions on how to create a draft (100% agreement for three raters). Our two-part classification scheme of periods of early comprehension and translation was general enough to allow for false starts, rereading for clarification, or puzzling over an appropriate "angle" for an essay. In other words, the two episodes encompass a range of composing styles while still helping to draw our attention to a common set of moves in the period of early comprehension.

Our three raters also looked for specific commonalities across the 17 student essays and think-aloud transcripts. Once the boundaries between the major periods of early comprehension and translation were established for each writer, raters isolated a few widely-shared moves. Early comprehension can be characterized as an exercise in summarization and recitation. Students tended to read quickly to summarize, reducing material to gists and grafting their experiences with time management on to key ideas in the readings without apparent concern for explicit task directions or the more implicit task to craft an original statement by "synthesizing" the available information with their own beliefs and experience. They read initially "to get a sense" of the main points of

each authority, often restating main ideas and writing them in their notes as if they were mining the assigned texts for nuggets of truth. Because of habit and necessity students brought a remarkably well-formed set of reading strategies to this task. By restating the authorities' main ideas they efficiently reduced the assigned readings to manageable units of information, using their experience most often to screen the main ideas for their relative popularity. Without much interruption, an idea was located and then validated ("I agree...that's good...") as to whether the writer in any way recognized or approved of the authority's position. When students did pause to explore an idea, they typically related a recent experience in school that matched or complimented a scene an authority just described. The commonality across the opening moves of our students and the self-assured way these moves were invoked surprised us although we predicted that students would rely on their expertise. Since out task was ill-defined for them (at its inception), we imagined that students would spend more intellectual time asking what a synthesis or original interpretation might consist of.

The students' early efforts to comprehend and manage the readings did appear to be quite practical. That a student would plunge into a writing task that requires a synthesis of diverse information, and rely on well-learned behaviors, is not surprising on several levels. First, these students surely recognized characteristics in this task that were common to past writing assignments. In school, students routinely find themselves, for example, in an entrance examination, needing to manage information quickly in order to construct a written statement. And our students all reported experience writing "research papers," which in varying degrees, called for canvassing diverse sources of information to support a thesis. In this way, their opening moves to summarize and reduce the assigned readings fit the task at hand in that students were asked to produce a draft by analyzing assigned materials and craft a response in one sitting. Also, as was mentioned earlier, the decisions a writer makes in this situation happen away from the influence of a teacher or peer, and we can expect a student to draw on familiar, well-learned routines. Hence, the absence of hesitation in acting out the assumption that this assignment involves (for example) summarization suggests that this sequence is practiced and, because of its familiarity, is a safe way to begin. Alone, these college students depended on familiar, successful, efficient comprehension strategies to gain control of a composing situation. Research on problem solving (Newell & Simon, 1972) has shown repeatedly that the first stages of searching for solutions are understood as the act of *finding* the problem and building a representation. Our students wanted to succeed, and success began by representing the reading-to-write task in a familiar form where well-learned procedures were appropriate and practical. In this way they performed as experts by quickly recognizing the useable elements in the writing task (the main ideas for example) which in turn invited ways to comprehend and begin to organize the required (as they saw it) information in their syntheses (see Glaser, in press, for a summary of "expert" behavior across specializations). In sum, these students were experts at recognizing the features of familiar school assignments and engaging, however superficially, appropriate procedures for comprehending the assigned readings. In doing so, they took the first practical steps to translate a representation of what they were supposed to accomplish into a plan for action. Their notes, chock full of salient main ideas, were poised for the construction of a summary essay.

The Students' Opening Moves--Origins in a Literate Culture

The opening moves, the procedures our students used to represent and act upon the reading-to-write task, are similar in kind to what a number of researchers and theorists have observed in the way reading and writing are taught in school. As mentioned earlier, certain features of the writing task were recognizable to students and invited familiar procedures to begin a response. In this case, the practical requirements

in the rhetorical situation seemed to bring those literate behaviors closer to the surface, but the task alone did not create or invoke them. National studies of achievement and instruction point to a tradition of knowledge compilation and recitation--similar to the orientation to knowledge and composing seen here--rather than a tradition of exploration, criticism, and thoughtful interpretation (summarized in Applebee, 1984b). For example, for many students the lack of accord between the authorities on time management was not seen as an invitation to impose a personal order on the subject matter, or a chance to sort out the validity of distinct arguments on the topic. Ambiguity was more a hindrance than an invitation, something to be quickly circumvented if it was noticed at all. A student's success at avoiding ambiguity and reciting main ideas mirrored what national assessments would predict: this success is partly due to the ability to record and recite facts and concepts, not to critical interpretation.

When students did turn to their relevant experience or opinions, they provided examples and counter examples but rarely pondered for any duration the validity of what (we thought) were sometimes quite novel connections between their experience and the ideas before them in the readings. Instead they relied on a "agree/disagree" framework to judge the issues in the readings. For example, one student chose a first sentence for his draft built on the idea that "many of the suggestions...seem very sensible." In order to find out "how sensible are these suggestions," he re-read to "agree" with an author's contention. Right and wrong, good and bad, agree and disagree are all examples of what William Perry found as college students' avoidance of ambiguity and intellectual complexity (1970). Ten of 17 freshmen in this study used this dichotomous frame in essence to clean up the ambiguity found in early comprehension. National studies and Perry's developmental scheme suggest that the opening moves demonstrated by these students reflect common practice within public education The student behavior illustrated thus far echoes a *culture of recitation* (Applebee, 1984a,b) where the emphasis is on accuracy of learning and routine recitals and not reasoned exploration and debate. The opening moves appear to coincide with an "inert knowledge" epistemology (Bereiter & Scardamalia , 1985), behavior similar to what Nelson labeled "low-effort" strategies demonstrated in writing research papers and projects over several weeks (Nelson, in press).

This paper began by proposing that a coherent image of writers at work would include contextual and cultural influences as well as each writer's efforts to re-represent and redefine an immediate rhetorical context through an act of publication. Looking only at the common opening moves in the period of early comprehension, the writer's role as agent within a linguistic community is not particularly apparent. Even though the assignment, to our eyes, calls for repeated examination of the task and chosen response, and even though the researchers and theorists mentioned above imply a united front in support of original, critical interpretation, students responded in a largely unoriginal (but practical) manner. As mentioned earlier, the literate behavior that students brought to this task constituted a form of linguistic expertise in the general community of *assumed* academic readers and writers. Students did not (initially) block (Rose, 1984) when they faced an unfamiliar set of readings. Instead, the opening moves succeeded as a form of "relative fluency" (Rose, 1985) where, in spite of the students' unfamiliarity with the excerpts or lack of involvement with the topic, they were able to recognize familiar features in the assignment and proceed. Their moves became a kind of "practical" cognition, a label Scribner has used to explain how, in specific, everyday circumstances, people work efficiently with little awareness of the economy of their effort (1984). Later in interviews and during classroom discussion, students reported that the assignment reminded them of writing tasks they had seen before in school. When a student was asked whether she had ever written a

"synthesis" or what the term meant prior to this course, she said that to synthesize meant to summarize in school, a task assigned to her many times over.

The practical, knowledge-telling orientation assures membership in one type of discourse community, a middle-ground that many "successful" college writers inhabit in advance of full participation in more specialized discourse communities. The distinction between writing to succeed in high school or to prepare for college and writing to be accepted by college readers can be glaring. The habits and assumptions that students depend on when they write to the *assumed* discourse community of "theme writers" (Coles, 1978; Heath, 1983) does help many of our college-bound students negotiate the entrance and essay examinations that mark acceptance into the university fold. A generic academic literacy, then, may be a precursor to more refined and specialized professional "conversations" (Bazerman, 1985) which develop later in a student's career. But, students' relative fluency does not come without costs. The facility our students displayed in representing and inaugurating this task, we believe, complicates the rigorous struggle to acquire different habits of mind. If students begin a reading and writing assignment with the assumptions and habits we saw and characterized above, the legacy of a common literate behavior interferes with the acquisition of new literate behaviors, those more specialized rhetorical and linguistic conventions in various areas of the university. The compatibility between a common set of opening moves and the assumed requirements for successful academic writing is more troublesome than it is convenient.

Translating Comprehension into a Draft:
The Legacy of Opening Moves

In the above section, we have argued that the immediate social situation for composing cannot be understood fully without taking into account currents within a larger literate culture; that these currents reside in the individual and are displayed through observable procedures, here the opening moves a student uses to respond to a writing assignment in school; and that these opening moves to comprehend the assignment and authorities in question quickly suggest for a student a practical but limited representation of what could be accomplished. Throughout the rest of this paper, we argue that consequences associated with "early comprehension," a student's first pass at translating an assignment into action, create a second legacy. Students who rely primarily on the common set of opening moves (described above), often as not find themselves in an a-rhetorical situation. Their roles as agents, with the opportunity to affect change within a community of knowledgeable readers, is diminished. To see how this is so and to explore alternative habits of mind, we will begin with a closer look at the opening moves and especially how they continued through the period of translation. The time and effort students devoted to configuring and acting upon a plan for writing suggests for us two different versions of how a student negotiates a reading and writing task. Students may too readily accept the procedures accompanying the legacy of schooling in that they remain faithful to the assigned readings and the well-learned habits of summarization and recitation. Or, they may tend more to question the familiar and the habitual, promoting their own values and ideas on the topic at hand and on acceptable prose. Finally, our goal is to help our students (when possible) consciously control the influence of their literate heritage as it interacts with the practical concerns of the immediate rhetorical situation for writing.

The opening moves seen in the period of early comprehension encumbered many students by issuing an orderly but rigid inventory of information on which they based their drafts. When students shifted attention toward the blank page, this inventory not only informed the next raft of writerly decisions, for some students, it also dominated composing. In effect, early comprehension produced a template for the emerging text

that they just could not deny. To look again at the opening moves that students used to construct this template, here are the set of early comprehension strategies used to initially respond to the assignment. In all but a few cases, these strategies comprise all the moves we observed in the episode of early comprehension (Figure 1).

- Restating an authority's ideas
  by paraphrasing
  by finding key words in the passage
  by categorizing the readings by assigning a persona
- Comparing personal experience to an author's ideas
  by imposing an agree/disagree framework to evaluate or to elaborate
- Connecting excerpts, ideas, or authors
- Acknowledging the task

Figure 1. The Opening Moves in the Period of Early Comprehension.

The students used three basic comprehension strategies: restating main ideas, comparing the readings and their experience, and connecting issues or authors in the readings. The variations (paraphrasing, finding key words, etc.) essentially gave students ways to label, classify, and arrange the assigned material. This inventory of main ideas, for the most part, became the tangible by-product of early comprehension, and the value of an inventory of ideas for this assignment is perhaps obvious. It is an efficient way to amass and connect disparate ideas quickly. This otherwise virtuous schema for ordering and efficiently arranging ideas, however, suggested a straightforward reading plan which, if allowed to go unchecked, sufficed for a writing plan. To a much lesser degree, the set of opening moves contained efforts to connect ideas in different passages and to briefly acknowledge task requirements. The students who did the latter only momentarily puzzled over (for example) terminology, and they continued reading or rereading with little deviation (Kennedy, 1985).

Translation began when students actively sought ways to translate into written form the products from a first reading and a first brush with the task. This translation can be characterized several ways, depending on the degree to which writers accepted or questioned the progress of their drafts. First, some students appeared to accept (whether consciously or not) the usefulness of a ready-made template of ideas with its implied organization for a draft. When this happened, little or no hesitation was apparent. Other students hesitated but only momentarily to puzzle over what they might do with their recent investment in a summary of the readings, or the absence of an angle to pursue to start writing. This hesitation *could* have developed into a fruitful examination of the rhetorical problem of translating early comprehension into a writing plan--except that these students seemed to have ready-made answers to their own questions. When they asked "How do I make sense of the reading?" and "What is my angle for the paper"? they answered with two popular representations of ways into and out of the problem of finding a plan for writing:

- **"If I can find an idea that will account for the readings, I can use it to order my draft."**

- **"I can organize the readings by whether they agree or not with my experience."**

These representations imply procedures similar to what we saw in the set of common opening moves: reducing concepts to key ideas and using experience as a filter to qualify information. These representations assume that somewhere there exists an idea which will both tame the inchoate nature of the assigned readings and simultaneously provide a script for writing. And they assume that connections made between personal experience and an authority's assertion are warrants enough for the inclusion of ideas in a draft. As we have proposed above and will demonstrate in a case study below, these assumptions bear some truth insofar as these representations do lead to written products, however ordinary.

Other composing behavior in the period of translation suggests an alternative characterization, one where students more actively negotiate their roles in a reading-to-write assignment such as the one they completed. Some students seemed to *recognize* that they have a choice in how to construct and act upon this assignment--as if not only to ask "How do I account for the readings?" and "How do I begin writing?"--but to pose the answers to those questions as two reasonable alternatives among many others. If students appeared to hesitate, to ponder where their representations of the readings and the task are taking them as writers, they purposefully complicated the period of translation with different perspectives on their composing thus far, which were accompanied by statements such as

- **"I need to consider my audience, the task to 'synthesize and interpret,' and my own goals in order to write my statement."**

With this comment, students were closer to recognizing that codifying the authorities into key concepts could actually interfere with translating text ideas into a working frame for writing. Or that a summary essay with a thin rhetorical purpose ("Time management is important...") might produce uneventful prose for a reader. What was most exciting to us was that the question of how to translate comprehension into a written product was couched in terms of larger, more situational issues. Some students noticed that any solution to the dilemma must take into account the rhetorical situation they faced, a composite of task- and class-based expectations and their own expectations for performance. When they addressed this composite, they took steps toward strengthening their roles as agents within the immediate composing situations.

If students adopted this frame of mind in the period of translation, they began to turn a potentially a-rhetorical situation into a rhetorical one where "finding something interesting to say" was at least as important as carefully representing the printed materials before them. In the think-aloud transcripts and later in class, several students talked about how stock introductions and list of facts did not produce particularly readable, interesting essays. Others students never outwardly realized this. What follows is the story of how one student writer, Nancy, proceeded a-rhetorically, using a search for encompassing main ideas and her experience to qualify the information. She accounted for the authorities, and this account became her draft--a safe path out of the assignment but, on another level, a trap.

A Case Study: Nancy

Excerpts have been pulled from Nancy's "think aloud" transcript to show generally how early comprehension leads to translation and how specifically a student represented the reading-to-write task as first and last an exercise in finding, to use her

words, the "relevant" main ideas on time management. Nancy begins by scanning the task and reading, demonstrating many of the opening moves common to the period of early comprehension (her writing is underlined).

> (After reading a passage)...so the most important thing to understand is that decisions on how to use the time is one of your best advantages... (after another passage)...so he's saying that even if you think you are too tired...you should keep concentrating...it's like having a second wind... (another passage, the italics denotes note taking)...so, *fatigue passes with concentration* ...that makes sense..if you think about it.. (She continues reading)...so schedule is an important part...but there are other things that are important too...like, uhh, knowing how to study...to create a quiet environment...(another passage)...that's true but you do what's due first... it's easier if you do a first draft in one sitting...but you shouldn't write the whole paper at once because you might have a change of ideas...

From these comments we can see Nancy restating the authors' main ideas and linking some of the ideas to her experience. After her first pass through the readings, she momentarily addresses the written directions in the assignment and invokes her representation of a key activity in the writing assignment. Although she does not state it directly, she implies in the comments below that to synthesize means to select the "relevant findings." Without hesitation, she begins re-reading, taking notes, using similar opening moves.

> ...what do they want us to synthesize?...so first I'll say what the relevant findings are and interpret them and try and figure out what "synthesize" means... so both James and Pauk are saying that concentration is a big part of pacing and planning...Lakein...he says that...it has to do with pacing and planning...

She does draw a comparison between two of the authorities, James and Pauk, but primarily begins to build her list of discrete, relevant findings. Several moments later, as she begins to translate her reading of the authorities into plans for a draft, she notices "categories," a nondescript concept that allows her to circumvent the ambiguous nature of the readings. She begins to build her draft by stopping reading (for the most part) and drawing upon her notes for ideas. With her notes complete and in front of her, she discovers a plan for her first paragraph, an idea ("pacing and planning") taken directly from the reading. Using the ideas recorded in her notes, she fills in her supporting detail. All of this happens with little hesitation or any outward self-criticism.

> ...I'm writing down notes and then I'll go back and revise the notes and put it into a better paper...There are basically two distinct categories here..the first part is how to set...set the right mood and this part of the paper tells what people really do.../...Ok so now I have notes and now I have to write the response statement... basically time management is broken into two parts...pacing and planning...*with good time management and optimal study conditions you can achieve...the best work possible*...so that's the first paragraph...and how each of these people, James, Pauk, and Guitton talk about it...

To finish her "statement" she uses a rhetorical move similar to the agree/disagree move common in early comprehension. She distinguishes the authority of students from that of the time management experts in the readings and applies her "right and wrong" analysis.

> ...and now I go to the second part of the paper, which is discussing these strategies that students use... and I guess instead of an interpretation it's an analysis...what's right with their strategies and what is wrong...

Because we see no overt objection to her emerging draft, we can assume it is acceptable to her. She now calls upon her knowledge of essay conventions and is soon finished.

> ...uhh, I need a conclusion...what's in my introduction...did I answer everything I said in my introduction?... talked about management... talked about optimal conditions...

Many of Nancy's responses to the assignment resemble those of her classmates, and her moves support our characterization of how a well-formed set of summarization strategies and comparisons between experience and the readings can build a template for a draft. For her, the shift from comprehension to translation came with little apparent effort. The goal to "revise the notes" led smoothly to a writing plan. She also used a version of the agree/disagree strategy to help her frame the remaining ideas in her final paragraph. And in her closing comments, like several of her peers, she gave some indication that she was familiar with the conventions of short essays in the English classroom. She demonstrated her know-how in moving from reading passages to reviewing notes to writing a draft with a coordinated introduction and conclusion, and her comments seemed to forecast this progression. Returning to our characterization of paths through the period of translation, she accepted her initial representations and saw no need to re-examine her early interpretations and strategies; she found a paper in her notes (Kennedy, 1985).

In this way, Nancy successfully completed the assignment--but in another sense she was trapped. She was trapped not by the absence of an approach or skills to respond to the assignment but by the limitations her response placed on her thinking. Her reading and writing habits and her assumptions about academic writing created a legacy within the act of composing which functioned as a prescription for how she would complete the assignment. Independent raters labeled the organizing plan in her first draft a "frame," meaning she created (for a reader) a superstructure for her summarization and commentary but not an original interpretation. Even after revising, her draft remained in her readers' eyes a frame, a well-structured inventory. We believe Nancy misread an opportunity. If Nancy had noticed and evaluated her early comprehension moves and the way she turned them into a design for writing, she might have asserted herself more in this assignment. It would be hasty to conclude that a heightened rhetorical sensitivity would lead directly to a more sophisticated draft, or one that would at least feature more of Nancy's own ideas on the topic. Yet, Nancy, because of the way she saw and responded to the reading and writing task, composed her essay with less rhetorical information at hand than others. For example, would it not be useful for Nancy to be aware of the similarity of her moves to those of other writers, the shape those moves gave her draft, and how they interfere with other rhetorical concerns? If readers consistently notice the generic nature of writing plans, then there could be a real gain in helping students to analyze the origins of those plans and, thus, the consequences of their initial representations of a reading-to-write assignment.

Asking Questions of a Legacy

The legacy of schooling provides our students with paths into and out of academic writing situations and assures them a form of fluency for minimum competency. Our students appear to know how to read for main ideas, to summarize

those ideas, and with common conventions to arrange those ideas in an essay *about* the topic at hand. To conclude this report, we want to argue that students also have the instincts to question a legacy of schooling and especially the procedures this legacy gives them to address a writing assignment. Since they bring these instincts along with the rest of their habits and assumptions, they are available but unfortunately less practiced. And they are not reinforced in academic environments where a faithful recitation of information is valued. We found instances of students laboring (in our eyes) to question--if not the antecedents to an act of composing--the more immediate consequences of their initial representation of the task and their opening moves to complete it.

We noticed students who more directly addressed the immediate rhetorical situation and their role as writers in that situation, especially in the period of translation. At this juncture, a key goal arose, one which largely determined the composing to follow: to "find a good idea." Students referred to "a place to begin...the big picture...an angle," and in each case where this happened students appeared to pull back from a reading plan and search for a topical focus that often included a rhetorical purpose. As noted earlier, for some students this angle was assumed to accompany the assigned readings or to magically rise out of a set of notes. After a first pass through the readings and the task directions, one student asked,

> How can you "interpret" it. None of it's the same (followed closely by)... I am doing an interpretation...I guess I go to the next page and write my notes...and...look up "synthesize." I know what that means so we have to combine everything...one "comprehensive statement" that's supposed to make sense but nothing relates...

The writer, similar to Nancy, assumes the task and the readings allow for a "combination" of information and the diverse nature of the material confounds his efforts. Other students pursued a "good idea" differently. As a counter example to the quick march from an inventory of ideas to a plan for writing, this student invested more time in the period of early comprehension and especially in her interpretations of the authorities and language she could use to present this interpretation. In doing so, she gained control over the readings and the writing task.

> (READING)...ahh, well it seems that...umm...Guitton in talking about how one prepares for peak performance that is..by getting enough sleep..getting enough sleep and being...relaxed...(repeats last phrases)...umm...hmm...reinforces Pauk's comments about the environment...um..environment is crucial...the right environment is crucial to a peak performance...ahh...the right environment is one...is one without distractions, no noise...no noise...no distraction...no noise...so both Pauk and Guitton believe in the importance of environment...

Although perhaps difficult to see in this short excerpt, one difference in how this student's reading practices differ from Nancy's is the pace at which the assigned readings are read and accepted as understood. In the moment shown here, the student is rather arduously making sense of the main ideas from two authorities, struggling to find the right words to capture her thoughts and arrive at a conclusion (however tenuous): the two authorities share some common ground. When the student finished a complete pass through the assigned readings, she too moved fairly quickly from reading and taking notes to text production, with the same outward ease as Nancy. The difference was in the amount of energy directed to understanding and reconciling the authorities in early comprehension. The creation of her inventory of ideas about the

reading came far more slowly and was accompanied by a search for language that would best let her make a point. The reward for these "inefficient" moves in the period of early comprehension was evident in the way readers responded to her writing. She produced a more complex "synthesis" of the readings with a novel organizing idea and structure for her statement.

Other students reconsidered the consequences of their early comprehension as they continued to search for controlling ideas and relevant material. One student went through four cycles of trying out organizing concepts that fit her interpretation of the readings and the assignment. This search amounted to a considerable intellectual investment as she moved from ruminations on "an important key to quality work" to "important characteristics" to "things to remember in order to enhance time you set aside" and chose "good advice for any student" before she quit. The fact that this student took the time to find four concepts that would suffice as an organizing concept should not be downplayed. Through trial and revision she questioned the use of stock leads such as "time management takes a different course for different people...time management is of great importance...time management is relative to each individual..." and so forth.

When we see students question a stock approach, as in the search for a controlling idea or a plan for writing, we cannot say how *conscious* any of these students are of their actions. We can say that their literate procedures effectively pose the question: How will readers respond to these controlling ideas? or How will an investment in a summarization of the readings complement larger rhetorical considerations? An action becomes a question, of course, only when students are truly aware of their habits and their consequences. Perhaps it is less the case that these students lack the ability to think and write critically as it is a case of them not being aware of their options. They are less practiced at risk taking, in this case delaying successful publication by questioning their own habits and assumptions and by complicating the act of translating a reading plan into a writing plan.

Our sense is that this awareness is limited by our assignments and the environments we create for self- and social-criticism more than an inadequacy in our students (Brown, 1986). At any rate, we know from talking with students and studying their writing and think-aloud transcripts that alternative representations and procedures do not need to be taught as completely new information--in the ways in which we would teach a specialized academic convention. There are ways to celebrate and reinforce those occasions when students actively throw into question their immediate rhetorical situation and where early comprehension and a reading plan are seen only as raw material on which to study the design of a paper--not declare it finished. If students can consciously slow the shift from early comprehension to translation, they practice a form of rhetorical sensitivity that can help to establish themselves as writers within a rhetorical situation.

Awareness in a Rhetorical Situation

What we want our writing students to learn is how to examine their composing processes, especially their opening moves to comprehend a task and assigned readings, and to locate these moves within the immediate rhetorical situation. This examination can include a self-study of the origins of a writer's literate habits and assumptions, the history each writer brings to a rhetorical situation. The place to begin is with a writing assignment and the composing behavior at hand. If writers must negotiate assignments and responses and negotiate current reading and writing expectations and time-honored expertise, we suggest the juncture between early comprehension and translation as a

place where this negotiation can be examined. It is here where a freshly constructed reading plan became (for our students) a blueprint for writing a first draft.

Through the semester, we found that teachers and students can make more explicit the routines and expectations they bring to a reading-to-writing assignment. It was illustrative to ask, for example, how the features of a given writing assignment matched assignments students had seen before in high school or other writing classes, and to explore how students responded to those features, how they defined success (how a reader responded or evaluated their work), and what they believed a teacher, school, or literate system wanted from them. Through open discussion and examples from drafts and think-aloud transcripts, students and teachers learned how they valued printed authorities, what a "controlling idea" is really supposed to control, and the relative value of a summarized idea. By doing so, students began to realize that a controlling idea controlled more than the order of ideas in a draft. It controls the character writers project with regard to topics, readers, and the larger community of readers and writers in which they compose. It was instructive, also, for students to watch as other writers wrestled with the lack of accord in the assigned readings and questioned commonplace rhetorical conventions. By sharing think-aloud transcripts and linking these oral texts to their written ones, we located commonalities and idiosyncrasies in the way students represented and acted out an assignment.

In some cases, a study of opening moves and how comprehension translates to action and a plan for writing helped students examine the local context and communities in which they reside. In this way, the relatively short-lived decision to question the practicality of a controlling idea or angle for writing or the decision to search for an alternative representation of the printed authorities, could act as a vehicle for a student's self-critique of their role in a language community. This kind of awareness requires writers to step outside of an act of composing to strive for a critical distance from a specific decision in an act of composing and to locate that composing act in a larger setting. Recognizing the characteristics of literate practice could provide students with the raw material to begin a self- and societal- critique, looking at and deciding upon a writer's role within politically and culturally defined communities (Chase, 1987).

If students and teachers study together the antecedents to literate behavior and study the consequences associated with habitual and less-habitual procedures for writing, they do so because of the need to create a meaningful piece of writing. The immediate goal for our students (we think a good one to pursue) is to produce interesting and useful writing. When this goal is extended to a larger critique of the writers' continuing role in a community of writers, in this case the role of writers in school, students are moving toward a positive form of "resistance," a term used by social and educational theorists to denote a political struggle against a dominant ideology (Giroux, 1984). We are happy if our students rethink a stock approach to a reading-to-write assignment and consider alternative behaviors. But, we are aware that this rethinking can carry forward the self-critique as a revealing activity, one which offers a student an opportunity for self-reflection and self- and social-emancipation. Recalling our preference for writing and writers who bring a healthy skepticism to academic writing in order to continually and creatively push out against the discursive practices around them, a theory of social and educational resistance can benefit from a cognitive equivalent. The mental tools for examining, redefining, and following through on a act of translation can spark a larger critique--if students and teachers are willing.

Besides this kind of political and social awareness, other researchers and scholars emphasize reading and writing instruction that builds for students an awareness of and control over habits and deep-rooted assumptions about language. Peter Elbow believes

we need to "develop more control over ourselves as we write so that we can *manage* (his italics) our writing process more judiciously and flexibly" (1985, p. 300). Post-structuralist theories of how readers construct meaning and not passively encode information suggest instruction to help students consciously explicate the repertoire of strategies and assumptions they bring to an act of composing (McCormick, 1985). Research on the rhetorical and linguistic case-building techniques in specifialized discourse suggests exercises where students recognize conventions in a specialization and in their own composing. Analyzing varied conventions can suggest why a commonplace fails to engage a reader who may expect a certain rhetorical move in a particular genre (Swales, 1984; Huckin 1987). And, an arm of educational research is now exploring the value in and methods for "teaching thinking" (for a comprehensive review see Nickerson, Perkins & Smith, 1985), exploring both domain-general and domain-specific strategies (Voss & Post, in press).

After all our illustrations and discussion, we would be remiss if we characterized rhetorical awareness as an act of devaluating or rejecting the ability to summarize and recite information. Even though we necessarily pointed to summarization and recitation procedures as a limiting "legacy," these skills serve as a superstructure on which to base rhetorical awareness and the procedures that complement it. In fact, current research and classroom practice suggest that students can be taught to increase their expertise in summarization and comprehension (Afflerbach, 1985; Brown & Day, 1983; Brown & Palincsar, in press). Training and practice in summarization in this way contributes to a writer's growing awareness and control over reading comprehension and can augment otherwise typical composing routines (Tierney & Pearson, 1985). Direct attention to early comprehension and summarization, in turn, might facilitate the recognition of alternative perspectives for truly original interpretations (Applebee, 1984b) and the recognition of the features and conventions of college-level academic discourse.

In this essay, we have tried to build detail into the image of how a freshman writer confronts the unique problem of representing and acting on a college-level writing assignment. We can expect our students to rely on their literate heritage, and in doing so, to use that expertise as a basis for "appropriating" rhetorical and linguistic conventions and topical authority which is not yet theirs. Young college writers facing the demand of new contexts for reading and writing, with new linguistic and critical expectations, need not rely exclusively on the habits and assumptions accrued through years of schooling. By looking closely at the juncture between early comprehension and translation, we find evidence that awareness and alternative routines are there. With help from teachers, students can return to this juncture, drawing upon these habits, as well as others, and can begin to translate their immediate rhetorical situation into more of a self-directed event. Instead of casting false starts, hesitations and second thoughts about a writing move as wasted energy, informed reconsiderations can heighten a young writer's rhetorical awareness and help to keep that writer's ideas and knowledge of logical and linguistic conventions at center stage in the act of composing academic discourse.

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